

WESTERN POTTER



07/71 #23

Jeff Reves, who made the "Personality Mugs" on the cover, has spent a year at the Santa Monica City College on an Art Major, and two years at the Kootenay School of Art on a Sculpture Major-Ceramics Minor.

This summer he is teaching raku, tie-dying and sand-candle casting at the Sprowle Creek Crafts Camp for children.

The mugs were created to fit his interpretation of the personality of the prospective owners.

The theme of this issue was going to be natural materials but everybody I contacted seemed to feel that they had to do more testing before they would feel confident about publishing anything. However, we do have the first part of an article by Jean Marie Weakland on how to test materials and blends of materials, and the new Harry Davis booklet is available with a great deal of information on the use of raw materials, so, hopefully, many more of you will try out what is available in your locality, write us about the results and we may get out an issue on the subject yet. The Cariboo potters have made a start as reported by Ruth Flower on their workshop with Frances Hatfield.

I think you'll enjoy Stan Clarke's article on the joys and hazards of glass blowing.

Speaking of hazards, I've run across a couple of new ones in pottery. I now stack my kiln almost directly under a row of swallows' nests. When I told Judy Clegg McLennon about this she said, "That's nothing! The last time I stacked the kiln I went out of the kiln shed to get something and came back to find a neat little blue egg in one of my bowls!"

It would seem our annual picnic occurs very often - something like B.C. Centennials. However, I promise you, no more annual picnics for approximately a year.

Ruth Meechan

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

When I printed Robin Peck's review in the last issue of the "Western Potter" on the Hatfield-Kingsmill-Turk show at the Kootenay School of Art in Nelson, I thought there would be a howl of protest from all over the Province over such subjective criticism, but there wasn't even a murmur outside of the following three letters.

Dear Editor: I have neither the time nor the inclination to pin ears back or forward about reviews of my work. Reviewing in this case was quite subjective and the article had to be read from that viewpoint.

However, I would like to make three specific suggestions which might prove helpful to the young reviewer in question.

1. In making a subjective review of work the addition of photos gives the reader some idea of the work in question. Since this show was fully documented by one of your fellow students, in black and white photos, that would not be difficult to provide.
2. When you decide to name techniques "decorated with bright underglaze" for goodness sake be sure of your technical ground. If you don't know, take time to ask the artist. You obviously did not ask Bob Kingsmill.
3. Lastly, before comparing works to any periods "pre-Columbian American" know your history of ceramics. You were half a world and centuries out in the influence you attributed to Bob.

Sincerely,

Frances Hatfield

Dear Editor: May I commend Robin Peck on his courage. Seldom have I seen an individual so scantily clad in knowledge and objectivity, jump so nakedly into the role of critic.

Mary Turk

Dear Editor: Re the Okanagan Potters' Show at the Kootenay School of Art, and our neighbour, Robin Peck's writing on same.

I found Frances' earthenware pleasing and can see nothing wrong with good functional pots, Robin'.

Bob's pots impressed us most. Rick and I first saw Bob's pottery three summers ago, and his pots in this show and the direction he has taken impressed us greatly. We found them beautiful, from the finely decorated ones to the large bold ones.

In fact, we bought a decorated vase, not because we had money to spare or because we needed more pottery, but because we simply dug his pots.

Yours from the Kootenays,

Pauline Hanbury

NEWS FROM THE CARIBOO POTTERS

Four years ago the "Cariboo Potters" group was organized and is now a well established group owning two electric wheels, two electric kilns, scales and other equipment. They are housed in rooms of their own under the auspices of Adult Education. The members can use the facilities at any time, but a regular business meeting with an educational programme is held once a month.

Because of the isolation from centres of instruction, restricted access to libraries and limited contact with more experienced potters, learning in our group has been strictly a do-it-yourself thing by the trial and error method. Lots of errors and many trials, I might add. So to gain inspiration and knowledge, we now sponsor two workshops a year. One, usually in the spring, for those of us who have learned a little the hard way, and one in the summer for the recruits. This system seems to work very well. The spring one seems to inspire us all into great production which we then dispose of at our annual June show; and the summer workshop held in August brings new impetus to the group to get going in the Fall.

Our latest workshop, held April 23-26, with Frances Hatfield as instructor, was over-subscribed member-wise. It was on local clays and slip glazes. To give an example of the enthusiasm, two potters came from Canim Lake 90 miles away, driving here and back each day. Another came from Bella Coola, 300 miles west on a gravel road - have you ever driven three hundred miles on a gravel road during break-up? With such eager interest, and Frances as instructor, needless to say we had an extraordinarily good workshop.

We are fortunate in this area in having easy access to many good clay seams. In fact the abundance and variety of good clays is more apt to confuse inexperienced potters than to delight them. With Frances' help we found that the clays from the southern area of the Cariboo - Williams Lake, Kleena Kleen, Alexis Creek, Soda Creek - were all about Cone 2 earthenware firing from a beautiful red to a rich mahogany color. The clay from the Quesnel area was much more plastic, firing a light buff and from cone 4 to cone 8. Frances helped each potter work out a mixture of his favourite local clay with a percentage of Quesnel clay so that a richly coloured cone 4 clay was attained.

Next, under her guidance, we developed clay slips made of the cone 2 local clays to be used on the higher-firing bodies. Some beautiful effects were obtained, mixing local hardwood ashes, local clay and, in some cases, local metal ores.

The day after Frances left, no less than seven out of the 15 members who took the workshop, drove the 80 miles to Quesnel to load up with Quesnel clay. We're "all fired up" to say the least. Thanks, Frances, for an enjoyable, informative workshop.

Our next project is an "Open Air Pottery Market". Williams Lake's Centennial project is an open air amphitheatre in the newly opened "Boitanio Park" in the middle of town. The first event falls to the lot of the potters. We are planning an old-fashioned "market" where the potters go in at 10 a.m. with their wares, set up their stalls - much like the old farmer's market - and sell their pots. We plan to dress in bright peasant garb, perhaps have a wheel or two in operation, some beach umbrellas, and hope the sun will shine that day. When we are sold out we will pack up and go home.

Already the community seems to be intrigued with the idea, so it should go over well. We pass the idea on to other groups. I suspect our biggest problem will be to have a sufficient number of pots to market.

Ruth Flower, Publicity Chairman for the
"Cariboo Potters"

FIRE AWAY ON GLAZE EXPERIMENTATION

The conventional limit formula approach to glaze experimentation is very effective for the potter with depth of experience, but the beginner may find it a bit overwhelming. For the novice then, the line blend and all its mutations might be a more fruitful way of learning about glaze materials. This approach, using just a few materials in the beginning stages, is more likely to develop an understanding for the materials as individual components.

To begin your storehouse of information, choose your clay body and the temperature you wish to fire to. Make several dozen test "cookies". Circle slabs about 3 in. in diameter pressed on to the elbow to make a small dish are good for this type of experiment because it is desirable to put materials to be tested into a container until you know the nature of the melt. This saves wear and tear on kiln shelves. Put a hole near the edge of the "cookie" so they may be either hung on a board or tied together in sequence for easy reference and comparison. Little information can be gleaned from some 100 odd test tiles heaped in a box!

Read the section beginning on page 202 (second edition) of Ceramics, A Potter's Handbook by Glenn Nelson. It is titled "Ceramic Chemicals" and has several sections which will mean more each time you read and compare with your tests. Keep in mind that a glaze contains three components: the flux, the stiffener and the glass former. (Read before buying materials! Make a small selection relative to the temp. you fire to and test those before buying more).

1. Mark each tile with the name of the material to be tested.
(Use iron oxide or a dark stain).

2. Pack a quarter teaspoon measure with each material to be tested.
3. Invert the spoon on to test dish being careful to retain the spoon shape. Observe and record the shape which each material retains in this dry state.
4. Fire to your temperature.

This type of test is known as a fusion button. Compare the material before and after committing to the fire. Did the material retain the spoon shape when inverted on to the dish? Or did it fall apart? Is it glassy or does it look like it did before firing? How does it compare with other materials fired at the same temperature? Finally, how does it compare to the written characteristic stated in Nelson's book?

After careful observation of the fired tests and simultaneous study of the written material, make an educated guess of two materials which might blend to form a glaze. Keep in mind the three necessary components and run a line blend of several of these groups -

Flux, stiffener and glass former.

To help in your selection you might choose to blend one material which fired with an active melt with one that showed little or no activity at that temperature. Mix your blends dry in the test cup using the following blends:

material
A \rightarrow $\begin{pmatrix} 100. \\ 0. \end{pmatrix}$ $\begin{pmatrix} 80. \\ 20. \end{pmatrix}$ $\begin{pmatrix} 60. \\ 40. \end{pmatrix}$ $\begin{pmatrix} 40. \\ 60. \end{pmatrix}$ $\begin{pmatrix} 20. \\ 80. \end{pmatrix}$ $\begin{pmatrix} 0. \\ 100. \end{pmatrix}$ \leftarrow material B

You need not test the first and last tiles in this sequence (100% of one material) because they were already tested in the first stage of the experiment. In the beginning stages it is wise to dry mix the materials for this method does not mix them as well as the wet mix, therefore you get more information about the nature of the materials. After doing several tests dry, begin blending the materials with water for more reliable testing.

You will notice that each test totals 100 which converts easily to percentage and grams. For these tests 1 gram of material is sufficient so you will be measuring .2 grams and .8 grams for the first test.

Always begin by marking the back of the tile. Choose your own system of marking but remember to keep careful records. Once these blends are fired you are ready to observe, compare and study each, separately and in relation to each other. Look for visual and tactile similarities between blends, then check to see if they have a common ingredient. After some study you will begin to isolate some materials for they are such strong ingredients they tend to dominate the surface consistently giving it a particular quality.

Do not be discouraged by tiles which at this stage are not suitable glazes. Remember! Your main purpose at this point is to obtain a grasp of materials and what they can do. Do as many of these line blends as you have strength for. Team up with another potter and share information. After trying some blends by the educated guess method, set some problems for yourself. For example, try to select two materials which will result in a white opaque surface, or a transparent glossy one. Maybe you would like to try a series using ash and clay. Try blending any feldspar with ash or any igneous rock with ash.

Study the line blend tests. Once you have achieved a test tile which appears to be a suitable glaze you must run tests on a larger more pot-like surface. Most any upright shape will do, but some forms make it easier to see the inside surface than others. For this reason you might find a teabowl shape most suitable. It has a larger surface than the test cookie yet it provides you with sides so you can check for slipping, and a container to catch the glaze should it be too fluid. Throw a number of teabowls off the hump. Do not spend a lot of time fussing and trimming - they are only experiments and you will use far too many to warrant the time to make them perfect.

At first you may want to try three different tests on one bowl, with each test overlapping, to see the results of two glazes applied one over the other. Eventually you should use one glaze per bowl to get the full effect of the surface quality. It is advisable to run a test of this size in two or three different firings before glazing your full dinner set. Once in a while things change and not always for the better.

That should keep you busy for a little while. More to come in the next issue to help you carry on from there.

Jean Marie Weakland

BLOWING GLASS AIN'T EASY

There are two types of glass blowing and they are vastly different. The first is a "bench operation" where pre-formed glass rod is blown and formed into objects used in the science or chemistry lab with, as a side line, the forming of little swans and things at county fairs. The other type is a "glasshouse operation" or is sometimes called "off-hand glass blowing". In this case a blob of molten glass from a glass tank is gathered on a long hollow steel "blow-iron" and then blown and formed into an object which, when completed, is slowly cooled in an annealing oven.

I got hooked on glass blowing at a Craftsman's Conference in Tring, England, on January 2nd, 1968, at 3.45 p.m. That's when I first tried it. Keeping that blob of molten glass on the end of a blow pipe was the most frustrating and exciting experience I'd had since I first centred a piece of clay on a wheel a hundred years ago, and I had to have a glasshouse. But you don't just go down to the corner store and buy one.

First, information is hellish hard to come by. There are no books on the technique of blowing glass. Tools and glass are hard to find, glass tanks and annealing ovens have to be built, but the hardest part is getting instruction on the blowing technique. Luckily I was able to get to England quite frequently so I made arrangements with the operators of "The Glasshouse" in London for private instruction.

The Glasshouse is a co-operative where a group of students and graduates of the Royal College of Art blow glass and sell it on the premises. My instructor turned out to be a petite young lady from the midlands with a great deal of patience, a cute accent and a liking for "Double Diamond" beer.

So I huffed and puffed, dripped molten glass all over the floor, walls and furniture, and stuck glass pots to the walls of the glass tank, to tools, the water bucket and a customer's purse. I learned the basic fundamentals of glass

blowing in front of an ever-changing audience of customers and "lookers" from the street, ending up with a couple of sore lips, two burnt fingers and a tremendous admiration for Dillon Clarke, my instructor.

Next, a glass tank had to be built. This is like a front-loading kiln with a firebrick tank in the floor to hold the molten glass, and fired from the top with either gas or oil, preferably gas. A chance remark to Gordon Barnes at a World Craft Council meeting produced a sheaf of most welcome material including some glass tank design specifications. So the glass tank was designed to melt 100 lbs. of glass at 2500 degrees and then was built. I planned on natural gas but have you ever tried to explain to a gas inspector what a glass tank is? To get around the problem I changed the plans to propane gas. Have you ever tried to explain to the Fire Marshall what etc. ?

Although warned against it I ordered tools from a firm in England. They promised to deliver the tools to the London airport for pick-up January 30th. The tools finally arrived at the airport in April. I should have known.

At the Glasshouse they were using glass cullet from the Dartington Glass Works. It is lead Crystal glass and beautiful to blow. I was informed it could not be exported. In the USA they were using a glass produced by Johns Mansfield for the fibre glass industry. It is shipped in the form of marbles for ease of handling. I ordered two hundred pounds and subsequently tried to get it thru Canadian Customs. Glass cullet is one thing marbles that's something else and dutiable. I think Customs thought I was going to pay a gigantic game of Chinese Checkers, but they finally cleared the glass as cullet.

An annealing oven, or leahr, is just a kiln, preferable a front loader, that can be kept at a constant temperature (around 1100 degrees) and then cooled slowly. I decided to use my

stoneware kiln for this purpose but something was needed to maintain that constant temperature. Bits and pieces from an old furnace control were reworked to cycle the kiln on and off at a controlled rate. It works beautifully.

A "Gaffer's Bench" had to be built. This is a bench with two parallel and horizontal bars protruding from the front on which the blow pipe or punty is rolled during the working of the blown piece. A marvering table, blocks and all the other paraphernalia were built, scrounged or knocked together and finally the time came to "make glass".

To get into production on a temporary basis, four small propane tanks were hooked up to the Maxon premix blower. These have to be refilled every day and changed every hour when they freeze up, but I am making glass. I am experimenting with techniques, trying ideas, learning about glass and having a ball. Just like a beginning potter, about eighty per cent of the work goes back into the scrap can, but at least I don't have to re-wedge it. The blob of glass on the end of the blow pipe is alive, responsive and beautifully FLUID. It is fantastic fun.

From my experience so far I have arrived at a few simple rules:

Always put the small end of the blow pipe in your mouth, the other end is red hot.

Never dribble molten glass down your leg or up your sleeve.

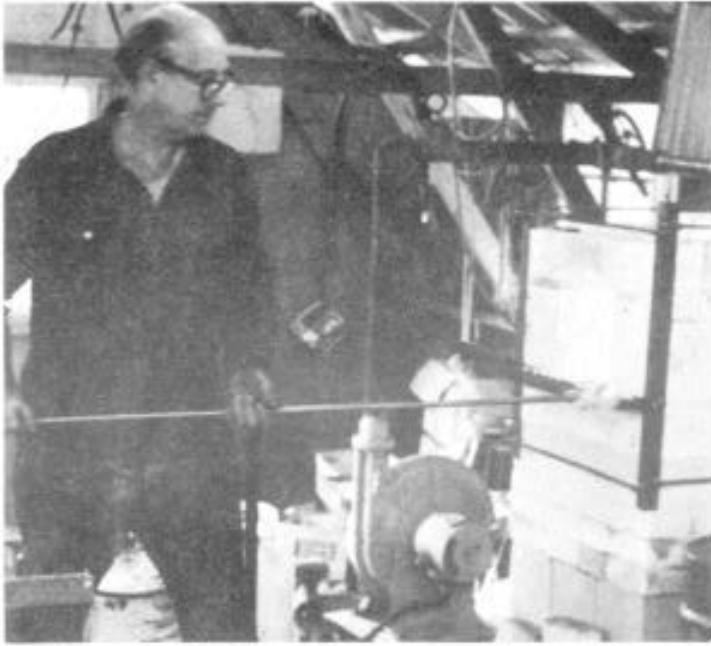
Never leave a hot blow iron on the gaffer's bench, it is at a critical level if you walk into it.

A clout in the mouth with a heavy iron can split your lip or knock a tooth out. Make sure your mouth is open.

Off-hand glass blowing is an exciting and creative craft, but it ain't easy.

Stan Clarke

Gathering glass from the tank



"Mavering" glass on iron plate to smooth out "gather"



"Blocking" solid molten glass before blowing



Attaching "punty" iron to bottom of blown piece



Stan Clarke glass



Experts:
Swallows at
clay building
Dave at
kiln building





THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL PICNIC AT IRIS SMITH'S

Left - a picture of your editor
taking a picture

Below, left to right -
the critical assessment,
Peter Grossman,
potters, Garrett and Perry

(more pictures next page)





ARCHERY-ZEN-POTTERY-PICNIC-RAIN

You probably didn't know I am an archer (well, not much of an archer, but I try). The thing that really impresses me about archery is its resemblance to pottery. A group of archers sounds like a group of potters sharing news of new equipment and sympathizing over age-old problems. For archery, like pottery, goes back to our primitive ancestors. More than that, it requires the same sort of discipline to learn. When I'm being coached in archery I'm reminded of learning to throw on the wheel. "Push! Push with your left hand. Keep pushing your bow towards the target and when everything is right, release smoothly. Oh! you dropped your bow and released with a jerk! Try it again." (and again --- and again).

Potters look to Japan for an ideal in pottery, and Japanese archers make an art of archery relating it closely to Zen. They say that if everything is right the arrow shoots itself. Doesn't that remind you of that rare moment when everything is so right that the pot seems to throw itself and is exactly right so that it needs no effort on your part to make it so? Reading one of Daniel Rhodes' books I was surprised to find him saying "It is like shooting with a bow and arrow. When it's right it's so easy it's as if somebody else did it".

On Saturday, June 12th, I was struck with another resemblance - utter dedication. If you remember, that was the day of the Potters' Guild annual picnic at Iris Smith's. It was also the day of the Maple Ridge Archery Club's annual Fraser Valley shoot.

The day started out quite promising weather-wise, with light cloud and a fair amount of sunshine, but by afternoon the clouds closed in and it rained. It poured. It deluged. But did that stop the shoot? Of course not. There were all the archers drenched to the skin but still lining up on the shooting line aiming at that elusive bullseye. Then I raced home, changed to dry clothes, dried my hair with my daughter's blow dryer, and trundled off to the pottery picnic. And there were all the potters out in the

rain glazing pots and poking them into Iris's raku kiln.

The weather did improve somewhat, some very beautiful pots came out of the kiln, we roasted wieners and marshmallows and gorged ou selves on delicious home-baked cakes and cookies, drank gallons of coffee, and had a wonderful time.

Incidentally, the archers went out the next day and shot all day in the rain. If we had a two-day picnic no doubt the potters would be out there, too.

Ruth Meechan

FOOTPATHS (June '69)

Footpaths - an unusual key that opened up the chance to do some raku with friends, the Sheldons, at their home, Great Henny Mill House, Suffolk, England.

While pondering over a map of footpaths in the local area, I noticed an ancient Roman pottery works marked on the map. With farther investigation of the site little was found of the Romans, of course, but there was good clay by the ton there. The place was now a gravel digs, but the clay had been slurried and channeled off into ponds just waiting there to be used.

There and then, plans were made to do some raku in the near future, but first I had to return to London as my present stay was now exhausted. During this time I managed to pick up some glaze materials and also made a pair of tongs. Having gotten all these things together and the warm weather of June upon us, I returned to Great Henny to continue the raku.

The first major step was the kiln. The construction was of common red brick for the firebox and cylinder (design a la Reigger, Whonnock '68) and the arch of an old rubbish bin lid with 50-50 clay and earth packed on top.

It was built into the bank of the river which ran at the back of the house. This turned out to be a most suitable location for the wind always seemed to blow through the firebox giving a natural draft.

Secondly was again the clay. It having been slurried previously it was very fine indeed and needed extra sand and grog to open it up. The grog we made from breaking up a brick and sieving it through a kitchen sieve. It was rather coarse but the clay in the end worked quite well.

The wood proved rather difficult at first, not for its rarity but for quantity. Luckily though, we managed a mini fall from the local wood works. I found the wood hard but quite good to fire with as it burnt more evenly and longer in comparison with the soft cedar and fir of our own locality.

With kiln god blessing, though we did have the familiar accompanying problems, we had good over-all results.

To bisque took approximately three hours while glazing took about 15 minutes per piece. We used Eppens basic glaze recipe using red lead 54, Borax 14, silica 40, china clay 4. Chrome was our only oxide and it gave us some rather nice yellow-orange and green colours. Though we only had 3 or 4 full kiln days, a good time and experience was had by all.

Richard Hawbolt

FIRE-AWAY

The new Harry Davis Booklet for Workshop II is now available. The price is \$2.75 if mailed, or you can save 25 cents and pick up a copy at a regular monthly meeting (beginning Sept.) for \$2.50. If you want one mailed, make out cheque to B.C. Guild of Potters and send to J.M. Weakland, Fac. of Educ., U.B.C., Vancouver 8, B.C.

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Speakers Guide

The Uster Kiln

Survey of Visual Arts for the Ceramic Arts (films
available for rental)

Periodicals:

Some copies of "Tactile"

Some copies of "Ceramics Monthly"

Jean Marie Weakland

HARRY DAVIS BOOKLET, WORKSHOP II

The second Harry Davis Workshop was organized by the B.C. Guild of Potters to try to stimulate interest in the use of local raw materials. Why use raw materials? Michael Cardew thinks it's a matter of pioneering, not so much doing something that has never been done before, but rather finding out for yourself from first principles. He says, in the preface to his book 'Pioneer Pottery', "It is simply the perennial instinct to return to the source - a source not only of clays and glaze materials but also of inspiration, the potter's invisible raw material".

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Jean Marie Weakland

HARRY DAVIS BOOKLET, WORKSHOP II

The second Harry Davis Workshop was organized by the B.C. Guild of Potters to try to stimulate interest in the use of local raw materials. Why use raw materials? Michael Cardew thinks it's a matter of pioneering, not so much doing something that has never been done before, but rather finding out for yourself from first principles. He says, in the preface to his book 'Pioneer Pottery', "It is simply the perennial instinct to return to the source - a source not only of clays and glaze materials but also of inspiration, the potter's invisible raw material".

This new Harry Davis booklet is a storehouse of invaluable information on the use of raw materials, not only geological origins and chemical analysis, but a very practical section on how to collect, prepare and test samples from your own locality.

In addition to this there is a complete summary of work done at the workshop in collecting and testing a wide variety of materials, with colour pictures of some of the resulting glaze tests; and also a section on the construction of pug mills, complete with detailed diagrams.

Ruth Meechan

Book Review - KERAMOS, THE TEACHING OF POTTERY

Franz F. Kriwanek, Kendal/Hunt Pub.Co., Dubuque, Iowa, 1971

This is one of the latest publications about Ceramics. It comes in paper back priced around \$4.50. Mr. Kriwanek states in his preface, "The purpose of Keramos is to provide the teacher of pottery with a text which presents the necessary technical Know-how of pottery making within a long overdue humanistic context". The quick overview which I have given the book seems to support his purpose. He includes all the basic chapters: clay, glaze composition, kiln building, techniques, etc. However, each chapter has been dealt with from a different approach. The chapter on clay, for example, contains several pictures of clay deposits. This is old hat to the experienced, but to the beginner, or person living in a city, what does a clay deposit look like? He includes a map with clay deposits in the U.S. marked. Each of his chapters seems to have something different to offer. The book is laced with a general sampling of photographs and diagrams. It has pug mill plans, kiln plans, etc. It appears at this reading to be one of the better basic books for the novice, both from cost and content.

Jean Marie Weakland

WALTER DEXTER/CAROL SABISTON SHOW

I am truly sorry that I am unable to augment this comment with at least one illustration of Walter Dexter's latest show, which was held from June 19th to July 3rd, in the Print Gallery, Victoria, B.C.

An odd way, perhaps, to describe the total effect, but one that keeps occurring to me in retrospect, is a kaleidoscope of shape and colour. The gallery's exhibit area is spacious, allowing for islands of interest which can be properly appreciated and allow freedom of movement before going on to the next. In this way articles on display can be seen at first in a grouping and then examined individually - a point both beneficial to the display and appreciated by the observer.

Held in conjunction with Carol Sabiston's highly coloured, imaginative and skillfully artistic wall hangings, Walter's pottery pieces were in no way overwhelmed but beautifully complimented. Despite his large output, Walter's work never seems to settle into mechanical sameness. As in other shows, here was an endless variety of colour shape, style, technique and firing range. There were boxes and plates, goblets, vases, bowls and wall hangings, and they ranged from raku through stoneware to porcelain. Each piece was a statement of well-controlled spontaneity and artistic imagination of which this potter is so capable. A new note in this show was the inclusion of the porcelain. These were wheel thrown pieces, some with impressed decoration and all with highly colourful glazes. Bold, simple oxide and gold decoration imparted an oriental quality. In summary, this was a very stimulating and much appreciated exhibit.

Pam Hansen

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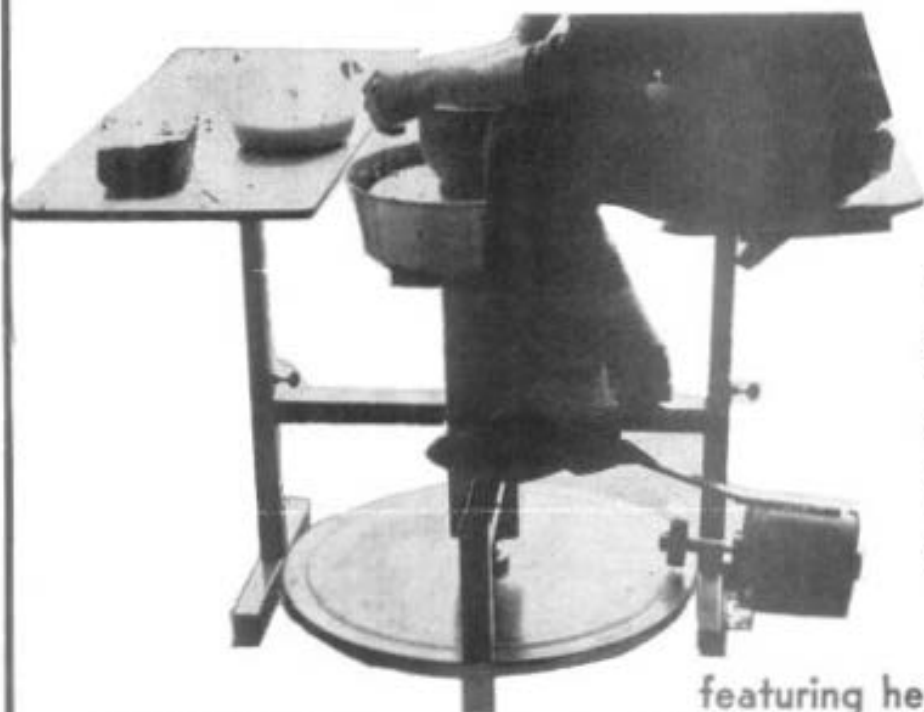
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Note: Permission should be requested from the B.C. Guild of Potters to reprint any part of this publication.

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